INTRODUCTION

'Set Me as a Seal Upon Thy Heart:' Constructions of Female Sanctity in Late Antiquity, Middle Ages, and the Early Modern Period brings new approaches and recent research in the investigation of a much debated topic, namely female sanctity. Structured in two parts, the volume concentrates on various areas of the Middle Ages, by discussing topics pertaining to women in connection to martyrdom, mysticism, or as political tools for Christian propaganda.

The first part of the volume, *Women (Re)Constructed*, is opened by Rosie Finlinson's *Bricks to Bones: Royal Women and the construction of Holy Place in the Stepennaia Kniga*. This essay elaborates on the conceptualization of women in the Stepennaia Kniga and their function on building sacred loci in Eastern Orthodoxy. Finlinson presents the symbolic connections between women and place, territorial unity, and dynastic branches while the female body substitutes the geographical location of the sacred (for instance, Olga and Evdokiia).

Following Rosie Finlinson's study, Andra Juganaru's essay titled *Macrina and Melania the Elder: Painting the Portraits of Holy Learned Women in the Fourth-Century Roman Empire* reflects on the involvement of religious women in theological and ascetic controversies. The portraits of these women are presented as constructed by male authors who emphasize, in their letters and vitae, both their education as well as Scriptural (religious) and Classical (secular) curricula. The positioning of these women in the center of religious polemics and debates suggests their comprehension and familiarity with these issues.

The first part of the book ends with Andrea-Bianka Znorovszky's study on *The Apocryphal Geography of the Virgin Mary in Hagiographic Collections: Dissemination and Liturgy*. The essay concentrates on the dissemination of Marian apocryphal imagery in Western Europe in relation to various textual sources used in devotional and liturgical contexts. It presents the geographic distribution, the confluence zones, and the density of Marian Apocryphal iconography with the purpose of establishing areas subject to individual case studies. Also, it highlights local developments and the incorporation of several iconographic themes into the apocryphal material.

The second part of the volume discusses *Power and Martyrdom*. Francesco Calò, in his *Devozione privata e ostentazione politica: Rugger I il Gran Conte e la diffusione del culte di Santa Lucia tra Sicilia e Meridione d'Italia*, comments on the way Roger I reactivated the cult of Saint Lucy by building churches and basilicas dedicated to her. Between the eleventh and the thirteenth century, Saint Lucy's veneration spread widely, thanks to the Normans, also in the rest of southern Italy, making her one of the most respected saints in the medieval sanctoral.

The various hagiographies and sources investigated in the first part of this volume are complemented by Cătălina-Tatiana Covaciu's *Beyond a Hagiographic Cliché. On the Supernatural Sustenance of Saint Catherine of Siena*. This essay offers a Christian anthropological perspective on the miraculous sustenance of Saint Catherina of Siena as reflected in hagiographic texts and her own writings. Covaciu concludes that "she endured tremendous pain in the effort to feed herself according to nature and considered it a gift from God, in order to correct her vices and expiate the sins of her neighbour."

The concluding chapter of the book is Silvia Marin's *Between Similitude and Distinction: Notes on the Iconography of Saint Wilgefortis in Medieval and Early Modern Period*. Marin's essay features the evolution of Saint Wilgefortis' iconography and its polymorphic construction which places her among those brides "whose endless love for Christ … prevents them from an earthly marriage" seeking unity with the divine. Accordingly, the author emphasizes issues related to paradigms such as closeness to a particular group of female saints, namely the crucified women martyrs, or to gender inversion by comparison to Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt.

The interpretations given by the scholars in their essays contribute to the literature in hagiography by adding new perspectives to the already existent material and debates in this field.

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